

Homily 7 1 John 4:4-12

by St. Augustine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of love as the distinguishing mark of those who are of God and the root of all good deeds.

Scripture: 1 John 4:4-7, 1 John 4:9, 1 John 4:11-12

Topics: "Gods Love", "Christian Charity"

Description

St. Augustine preaches about the importance of love as a manifestation of God's presence within us, emphasizing that those who love are born of God and know Him, while those who do not love do not know God. He highlights that God's love was demonstrated through sending His Son as an Atoner for our sins, urging us to love one another as God has loved us. Augustine explains that charity, rooted in love, is the key to discerning between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error, and that all actions should be done in love to bear good fruit.

Transcript

Now are you of God, little children, and have overcome him: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in this world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God hears not us. From this know we the spirit of truth, and [the spirit] of error. Dearly, beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God in us, that God sent His only-begotten Son into this world, that we may live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the Atoner for our sins. Dearly beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man has seen God at any time.

1. So is this world to all the faithful seeking their own country, as was the desert to the people Israel. They wandered indeed as yet, and were seeking their own country: but with God for their guide they could not wander astray. Their way was God's bidding. For where they went about during forty years, the journey itself is made up of a very few stations, and is known to all. They were retarded because they were in training, not because they were forsaken. That therefore which God promises us is ineffable sweetness and a good, Isaiah 64:4 as the Scripture says, and as you have often heard by us rehearsed, which eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man. 1 Corinthians 2:9 But by temporal labors we are exercised, and by temptations of this present life are trained. Howbeit, if you would not die

of thirst in this wilderness, drink charity. It is the fountain which God has been pleased to place here that we faint not in the way: and we shall more abundantly drink thereof, when we have come to our own land. The Gospel has just been read; now to speak of the very words with which the lesson ended, what other thing heard ye but concerning charity? For we have made an agreement with our God in prayer, that if we would that He should forgive us our sins, we also should forgive the sins which may have been committed against us. Matthew 6:12 Now that which forgives is none other than charity. Take away charity from the heart; hatred possesses it, it knows not how to forgive. Let charity be there, and she fearlessly forgives, not being straitened. And this whole epistle which we have undertaken to expound to you, see whether it commends anything else than this one thing, charity. Nor need we fear lest by much speaking thereof it come to be hateful. For what is there to love, if charity come to be hateful? It is by charity that other things come to be rightly loved; then how must itself be loved! Let not that then which ought never to depart from the heart, depart from the tongue.

2. Now, says he, are you of God little children, and have overcome him: 1 John 4:4 whom but Antichrist? For above he had said, Whosoever unmakes Jesus Christ and denies that He has come in the flesh is not of God. Now we expounded, if you remember, that all those who violate charity deny Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh. For Jesus had no need to come but because of charity: as indeed the charity we are commending is that which the Lord Himself commends in the Gospel, Greater love than this can no man have, that a man lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13 How was it possible for the Son of God to lay down His life for us without putting on flesh in which He might die? Whosoever therefore violates charity, let him say what he will with his tongue, his life denies that Christ has come in the flesh; and this is an antichrist, wherever he may be, wherever he have come in. But what says the apostle to them who are citizens of that country for which we sigh? You have overcome him. And whereby have they overcome? Because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in this world. Lest they should attribute the victory to their own strength, and by arrogance of pride should be overcome, (for whomsoever the devil makes proud, he overcomes,) wishing them to keep humility, what says he? You have overcome him. Every man now, at hearing this saying, You have overcome, lifts up the head, lifts up the neck, wishes himself to be praised. Do not extol yourself; see who it is that in you has overcome. Why have you overcome? Because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world. Be humble, bear your Lord; be the beast for Him to sit on. Good is it for you that He should rule, and He guide. For if you have not Him to sit on you, you may lift up the neck, may strike out the heels: but woe to you without a ruler, for this liberty sends you among the wild beasts to be devoured!

3. These are of the world. 1 John 4:5 Who? The antichrists. You have already heard who they be. And if you be not such, you know them, but whosoever is such, knows not. These are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world hears them. Who are they that speak of the world? Mark who are against charity. Behold, you have heard the Lord saying, If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your trespasses. But if you forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:14-15 It is the sentence of Truth: or if it be not Truth that speaks, gainsay it. If you are a Christian and believest Christ, He has said, I am the truth. This sentence is true, is firm. Now hear men that speak of the world. And will you not avenge yourself? And will you let him say that he has done this to you? Nay: let him feel that he has to do with a man. Every day are such things said, They that say such things, of the world speak they, and the world hears them. None say such things but those that love the world, and by none are such things heard but by those who love the world. And you have heard that to love the world and neglect charity is to deny that Jesus came in the flesh. Or say if the Lord Himself in the flesh did that? If, being buffeted, He willed to be avenged? If,

hanging on the cross, He did not say, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do? Luke 23:34 But if He threatened not, who had power; why do you threaten, why are you inflated with anger, who art under power of another? He died because it was His will to die, yet He threatened not; you know not when you shall die, and do you threaten?

4. We are of God. 1 John 4:6 Let us see why; see whether it be for any other thing than charity. We are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God hears not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and of error: namely by this, that he that hears us has the spirit of truth; he that hears not us, has the spirit of error. Let us see what he advises, and let us choose rather to hear him advising in the spirit of truth, and not antichrists, not lovers of the world, not the world. If we are born of God, beloved, 1 John 4:7 he goes on-- see above from what: We are of God: he that knows God hears us; he that is not of God hears not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and of error: aye, now, he makes us eagerly attentive: to be told that he who knows God, hears; but he who knows not, hears not; and that this is the discerning between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error: well then, let us see what he is about to advise; in what we must hear him-- Beloved, let us love one another. 1 John 4:7 Why? Because a man advises? Because love is of God. Much has he commended love, in that he has said, Is of God: but he is going to say more; let us eagerly hear. At present he has said, Love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God. 1 John 4:7-8 Why? For God is love [Love is God]. What more could be said, brethren? If nothing were said in praise of love throughout the pages of this epistle, if nothing whatever throughout the other pages of the Scriptures, and this one only thing were all we were told by the voice of the Spirit of God, For Love is God; nothing more ought we to require.

5. Now see that to act against love is to act against God. Let no man say, I sin against man when I do not love my brother, (mark it!) and sin against man is a thing to be taken easily; only let me not sin against God. How do you not sin against God, when you sin against love? Love is God. Do we say this? If we said, Love is God, haply some one of you might be offended and say, What has he said? What meant he to say, that Love is God? God gave love, as a gift God bestowed love. Love is of God: Love IS God. Look, here have ye, brethren, the Scriptures of God: this epistle is canonical; throughout all nations it is recited, it is held by the authority of the whole earth, it has edified the whole earth. You are here told by the Spirit of God, Love is God. Now if you dare, go against God, and refuse to love your brother!

6. In what sense then was it said a while ago, Love is of God; and now, Love IS God? For God is Father and Son and Holy Ghost: the Son, God of God, the Holy Ghost, God of God; and these three, one God, not three Gods. If the Son be God, and the Holy Ghost God, and that person loves in whom dwells the Holy Ghost: therefore Love is God; but IS God, because Of God. For you have both in the epistle; both, Love is of God, and, Love is God. Of the Father alone the Scripture has it not to say, that He is of God: but when you hear that expression, Of God, either the Son is meant, or the Holy Ghost. Because while the apostle says, The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us: Romans 5:5 let us understand that He who subsists in love is the Holy Ghost. For it is even this Holy Spirit, whom the bad cannot receive, even He is that Fountain of which the Scripture says, Let the fountain of your water be your own, and let no stranger partake with you. Proverbs 5:16-17 For all who love not God, are strangers, are antichrists. And though they come to the churches, they cannot be numbered among the children of God; not to them belongs that Fountain of life. To have baptism is possible even for a bad man; to have prophecy is possible even for a bad man. We find that king Saul had prophecy: he was persecuting holy David, yet was he filled with the spirit of prophecy, and began to prophesy. 1 Samuel xix To receive the sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord is possible even for a bad man: for of such it is

said, He that eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself. 1 Corinthians 11:29 To have the name of Christ is possible even for a bad man; i.e. even a bad man can be called a Christian: as they of whom it is said, They polluted the name of their God. Ezekiel 36:20 I say, to have all these sacraments is possible even for a bad man; but to have charity, and to be a bad man, is not possible. This then is the peculiar gift, this the Fountain that is singly one's own. To drink of this the Spirit of God exhorts you, to drink of Himself the Spirit of God exhorts you.

7. In this was manifested the love of God in us. 1 John 4:9 Behold, in order that we may love God, we have exhortation. Could we love Him, unless He first loved us? If we were slow to love, let us not be slow to love in return. He first loved us; not even so do we love. He loved the unrighteous, but He did away the unrighteousness: He loved the unrighteous, but not unto unrighteousness did He gather them together: He loved the sick, but He visited them to make them whole. Love, then, is God.

In this was manifested the love of God in us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world, that we may live through Him. As the Lord Himself says: Greater love than this can no man have, that a man lay down his life for his friends: John 15:13 and there was proved the love of Christ towards us, in that He died for us: how is the love of the Father towards us proved? In that He sent His only Son to die for us: so also the apostle Paul says: He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how has He not with Him also freely given us all things?

Romans 8:32 Behold the Father delivered up Christ; Judas delivered Him up; does it not seem as if the thing done were of the same sort? Judas is traditor, one that delivered up, [or, a traitor]: is God the Father that? God forbid! Do you say. I do not say it, but the apostle says, He that spared not His own Son, but tradidit Eum delivered Him up for us all. Both the Father delivered Him up, and He delivered up Himself. The same apostle says: Who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

Galatians 2:20 If the Father delivered up the Son; and the Son delivered up Himself, what has Judas done? There was a traditio (delivering up) by the Father; there was a traditio by the Son; there was a traditio by Judas: the thing done is the same, but what is it that distinguishes the Father delivering up the Son, the Son delivering up Himself, and Judas the disciple delivering up his Master? This: that the Father and the Son did it in love, but Judas did this in treacherous betrayal.

You see that not what the man does is the thing to be considered; but with what mind and will he does it. We find God the Father in the same deed in which we find Judas; the Father we bless, Judas we detest. Why do we bless the Father, and detest Judas? We bless charity, detest iniquity. How great a good was conferred upon mankind by the delivering up of Christ! Had Judas this in his thoughts, that therefore he delivered Him up? God had in His thoughts our salvation by which we were redeemed; Judas had in his thoughts the price for which he sold the Lord.

The Son Himself had in His thoughts the price He gave for us, Judas in his the price he received to sell Him. The diverse intention therefore makes the things done diverse. Though the thing be one, yet if we measure it by the diverse intentions, we find the one a thing to be loved, the other to be condemned; the one we find a thing to be glorified, the other to be detested. Such is the force of charity. See that it alone discriminates, it alone distinguishes the doings of men.

8. This we have said in the case where the things done are similar. In the case where they are diverse, we find a man by charity made fierce; and by iniquity made winningly gentle. A father beats a boy, and a boy-stealer caresses. If you name the two things, blows and caresses, who would not choose the

caresses, and decline the blows? If you mark the persons, it is charity that beats, iniquity that caresses. See what we are insisting upon; that the deeds of men are only discerned by the root of charity. For many things may be done that have a good appearance, and yet proceed not from the root of charity. For thorns also have flowers: some actions truly seem rough, seem savage; howbeit they are done for discipline at the bidding of charity. Once for all, then, a short precept is given you: Love, and do what you will: whether you hold your peace, through love hold your peace; whether you cry out, through love cry out; whether you correct, through love correct; whether you spare, through love do you spare: let the root of love be within, of this root can nothing spring but what is good.

9. In this is love-- in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only-begotten Son into this world, that we may live through Him.-- In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us: 1 John 4:9-10 we did not love Him first: for to this end loved He us, that we may love Him: And sent His Son to be the Atoner for our sins: *litateorem*, i.e. one that sacrifices. He sacrificed for our sins. Where did He find the sacrifice? Where did He find the victim which he would offer pure? Other He found none; His own self He offered. Beloved, if God so loved us we ought also to love one another. 1 John 4:11 Peter, says He, do you love me? And he said, I love. Feed my sheep.

10. No man has seen God at any time: 1 John 4:12 He is a thing invisible; not with the eye but with the heart must He be sought. But just as if we wished to see the sun, we should purge the eye of the body; wishing to see God, let us purge the eye by which God can be seen. Where is this eye? Hear the Gospel: Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Matthew 5:8 But let no man imagine God to himself according to the lust of his eyes. For so he makes unto himself either a huge form, or a certain incalculable magnitude which, like the light which he sees with the bodily eyes, he makes extend through all directions; field after field of space he gives it all the bigness he can; or, he represents to himself like as it were an old man of venerable form.

None of these things do you imagine. There is something you may imagine, if you would see God; God is love. What sort of face has love? What form has it? What stature? What feet? What hands has it? No man can say. And yet it has feet, for these carry men to church: it has hands; for these reach forth to the poor: it has eyes; for thereby we consider the needy: Blessed is the man, it is said, who considers the needy and the poor. It has ears, of which the Lord says, He that has ears to hear let him hear.

Luke 8:8 These are not members distinct by place, but with the understanding he that has charity sees the whole at once. Inhabit, and you shall be inhabited; dwell, and you shall be dwelt in. For how say you, my brethren? Who loves what he does not see? Now why, when charity is praised, do ye lift up your hands, make acclamation, praise? What have I shown you? What I produced, was it a gleam of colors? What I propounded, was it gold and silver? Have I dug out jewels from hid treasures?

What of this sort have I shown to your eyes? Is my face changed while I speak? I am in the flesh; I am in the same form in which I came forth to you; you are in the same form in which you came hither: charity is praised, and you shout applause. Certainly ye see nothing. But as it pleases you when you praise, so let it please you that you may keep it in your heart. For mark well what I say brethren; I exhort you all, as God enables me, unto a great treasure. If there were shown you a beautiful little vase, embossed, inlaid with gold, curiously wrought, and it charmed your eyes, and drew towards it the eager desire of your heart, and you were pleased with the hand of the artificer, and the weight of the silver, and the splendor of the metal; would not each one of you say, O, if I had that vase!

And to no purpose ye would say it, for it would not rest with you to have it. Or if one should wish to have it, he might think of stealing it from another's house. Charity is praised to you; if it please you, have it, possess it: no need that you should rob any man, no need that you should think of buying it; it is to be had freely, without cost. Take it, clasp it; there is nothing sweeter. If such it be when it is but spoken of, what must it be when one has it?

11. If any of you perchance wish to keep charity, brethren, above all things do not imagine it to be an abject and sluggish thing; nor that charity is to be preserved by a sort of gentleness, nay not gentleness, but tameness and listlessness. Not so is it preserved. Do not imagine that you then love your servant when you do not beat him, or that you then love your son when you give him not discipline, or that you then love your neighbor when you dost not rebuke him: this is not charity, but mere feebleness.

Let charity be fervent to correct, to amend: but if there be good manners, let them delight you; if bad, let them be amended, let them be corrected. Love not in the man his error, but the man: for the man God made, the error the man himself made. Love that which God made, love not that which the man himself made. When you love that, you take away this: when you esteem that, you amend this. But even if you be severe at any time, let it be because of love, for correction. For this cause was charity betokened by the Dove which descended upon the Lord.

That likeness of a dove, the likeness in which came the Holy Ghost, by whom charity should be shed forth into us: wherefore was this? The dove has no gall: yet with beak and wings she fights for her young; hers is a fierceness without bitterness. And so does also a father; when he chastises his son, for discipline he chastises him. As I said, the kidnapper, in order that he may sell, inveigles the child with bitter endearments; a father, that he may correct, does without gall chastise.

Such be ye to all men. See here, brethren, a great lesson, a great rule: each one of you has children, or wishes to have; or if he has altogether determined to have no children after the flesh, at least spiritually he desires to have children:-- what father does not correct his son? What son does not his father discipline? And yet he seems to be fierce with him. It is the fierceness of love, the fierceness of charity: a sort of fierceness without gall after the manner of the dove, not of the raven.

Whence it came into my mind, my brethren, to tell you, that those violaters of charity are they that have made the schism: as they hate charity itself, so they hate also the dove. But the dove convicts them: it comes forth from heaven, the heavens open, and it abides on the head of the Lord. Wherefore this? That John may hear, This is He that baptizes. John 1:33 Away, you robbers; away, you invaders of the possession of Christ! On your own possessions, where you will needs be lords, you have dared to fix the titles of the great Owner.

He recognizes His own titles; He vindicates to Himself His own possession. He does not cancel the titles, but enters in and takes possession. So in one that comes to the Catholic Church, his baptism is not cancelled, that the title of the commander be not cancelled: but what is done in the Catholic Church? The title is acknowledged; the Owner enters in under His own titles, where the robber was entering in under titles not his own.

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